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ABSTRACT

Detailing the decisions and procedures involved in the development of a community school (K-9) on the Tobique Indian Reserve in New Brunswick, Canada, this report describes the initial stages of development and presents the viewpoint of the education project director. Among the procedures, processes, problems, and conflicts described are: (1) selection of the education project director; (2) use of a community survey to determine community educational needs and preferences; (3) creation of a 4-member team of advisors to aid the chief and council in deciding on facility type and program direction; (4) securing an architect who could be made to respect Reserve authority rather than that of Indian Affairs; (5) recruitment of a suitable director; (6) a communication breakdown between the school board, the chief, and the advisory team; (7) conflict between the Reserve and Indian Affairs over land, money, personnel, etc. (an "approved" budget went from $313,000 to $250,000); and (8) authority conflicts among all decision makers. Despite the numerous problems cited, this report indicates that the school did open sometime in 1975 but still needs: (1) an acceptable education agreement; (2) renewal of discussions between the chief, council, and school board; (3) negotiation of a realistic budget and fiscal control with Indian Affairs; and (4) on-going staff and curriculum development. (JC)

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REPORT ON AN EFFORT TO CREATE AN INDIAN COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Darryl Nicholas
Tobique Indian Reserve

1. Introduction

A Native Reservation is a place where most people are at the total mercy of the formal power whose control of the welfare program can't be questioned, a place where for centuries things really have been done for the masses not with them. In any task, if the job is to be done right, it must set deliberate seeds which will foster collective decision making. If community functions, like the proper translation of education concerns, are to succed, they must reflect the needs of the community.

This paper talks of the things, of processes, which have been set in place to begin the task of establishing native education and to seed for the future the various activities which when mounted may assure the success of the project - "relevant Maliseet education." To walk back to the beginning of a trail we walked together in this project, brings back memories of many joys and much sadness. Both make up the history reported here. First, one must bear in mind in this as in many "cultures" many act from the belief that "he's got the job to do - he better know what he is doing or we'll mouth him to tremendous shame," "he has been chosen by the formal power to get good education - we will confuse him by our ambivalence which is the habit of our lives." This was the attitude which was present in the minds of many for this was the behavior of many we worked for. The "concensus" in the Chief and Council was that we could do the job. However, upon interviewing individual councillors, we found that they were very negative about the construction of the new school. They did not believe the building or the program would ever exist or be allowed to happen. Also, the Chief and Council had advised us to stay away from Indian Affairs since if Indian Affairs had had any clues as to how to address the problem of "relevant Maliseet education," Indians wouldn't be in the mess they are in.

2. First Steps

To begin, Darryl Nicholas, the education project director named by the Chief and Council, visited Roland Goddu in the Spring of 1973 to discuss the task. As Darryl stated it, the task was to tap our energy, our knowledge to translate together two things: the appropriate physical environment to house native education and the ways of training personnel to be prepared to teach Indian children. We agreed that the task would require experts who would be willing to work for a beginner's consultant fee plus travel and lodging expenses. We accepted the challenge "can Indian children, or the Indian nation control their destiny through good solid education?" We also accepted because despite all the federal money spent on Native education in the U.S.A. and Canada, not enough had been done, no magic solution had been reached.

The first steps on the Reserve were to begin things like house to house interviews with people on whether they wanted a school on the Reserve, covering what grades and present attitudes about the education programs available to the Reserve. Most people were very dissatisfied that young people were being bussed to a nearby school system where most of the Indian children failed. The Indian drop out rate in the junior high grades was between 92% and 95%. Most favored a school right on the Reserve up to the end of grade twelve. The house to house interviews took over a month. In the meantime, a study of the school register was made to determine the number of grade one children coming in each year from 1955 to 1973.

Darryl Nicholas reported on the community survey to the Chief and Council. The Chief and Council instructed Darryl Nicholas to have a Team of consultants made up of Dr. Roland Goddu - policy advisor, Dr. Alexander Plante - curriculum advisor, and Dr. Robert Avery - facilities advisor examine the implications of a community school building and program covering up to the end of high school. The Team found that it would be most difficult to accommodate grades up to twelve because of the cost of specialized teachers and facilities in the senior high school grades would be exorbitant. Finally the Chief and Council agreed to go with a school housing kindergarten to ninth grade, and arranging the schedule for the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades so that industrial arts and home economics would be taken in Andover, N.B. where adequate facilities would be available.

3. Creating a Team of Advisors

Early in the project it was decided to request that the Chief and Council collectively be involved in establishing the various aspects of the "Community School, a place where any Maliseet can learn something." A first step was to educate through extensive discussion with the council. A team made up of Darryl Nicholas, Roland Goddu, Robert Avery, and Alexander Plante was created to explain the advantages and disadvantages of variously shaped schools (round, rectangle, and triangle shapes) as well as various facilities like the gym, the health unit, the cafeteria, a student councillor office. The basis for the discussions by the Council were short, written, easily readable material prepared by the Team. We also used a drawing out session where we asked and recorded what the Chief and Council had as a vision. Finally, we found real live examples of the ideas we talked about. We actually took the Chief and Councillors to see for themselves what various shaped schools looked like and what people and children in such schools did and did not do. The Team felt that this aspect of the task "Discovering Real Maliseet Education" went very well. The Team purposely set about bringing the planning which shaped the school to the Reserve and to the people of the Reservation. The idea was "let's bring the resources here, let's bring the experts here to look at our local needs and to work on real problems." You see, up until this point, Indian Affairs always planned for the Reserve in Fredericton or Ottawa. The Reserve had to go to these places instead of the planners coming here. They told the Reserve about things they had seen, instead of helping the Reserve see for itself.

4. Getting a Plant Started

The education specifications for the physical design were drafted by the Team and brought to the Chief and Council for extensive discussions. This was a major effort since we hoped to make the final paper watertight. The Team was aware that Indian Affairs would examine every detail, try to knock it down and finally base its decision for funding on the document. In the meantime, Darryl was assigned to find an architect who designed good buildings (especially good roofs!) and an architect who would be controlled by the Reserve instead of the government. The Team agreed that "it is very crucial that he (architect) be controlled, that he not be allowed to tell you what he wants." This turned out to be one of the first in Canada. Until this project, all architectural advice came from Ottawa Indian Affairs Technical Services and Federal Department of Public Works, to save the 6% architect's fee (in our case, it was approximately $47,000).

Once the architect was selected the Team agreed that Robert Avery and Alexander Plante would concentrate on physical design and that Darryl Nicholas and Roland Goddu would concentrate on Program. Anyhow, the architect brought in, quickly began to sketch the various areas of the school. It had already been decided by the Chief and Council upon advice from the Team that 800-900 square feet would be allotted for each classroom, that there be a community size gym, an administration area, plenty of storage space, plus a good Resource Library, and a fine arts area. We had already determined the shape of the building, and we had the education specifications. When the architect came on board, really all he had to do was fit in spaces. Like all professionals, the architect had a hard time listening to our verbal and written ideas of physical space. Also, he had a hard time listening to Indians whom he had "known" up to this point in his life as fiddlehead pickers and welfare recipients. This was an adjustment alright!

With written estimates of square footage, of student population, of the architect's plans for the proposed building, the Team and Council met to discuss the essentials and the types of concessions the Reserve would bargain for with the Indian Affairs. Only then did the Chief and Council present our sketches and plans to Indian Affairs who, up to this point, had not been invited to our meetings. We didn't know some very important things like the fact that about 1969 or 1970, someone from Indian Affairs had put in a Capital requirement estimate to replace the present 70 year old school structure here in Maliseet with a new plant to accommodate K-6 education programs at a cost estimate of $800,000. The Chief and Council also found that when they won the right to have an architect of our own choice, they could not hold the fee in our account in a bank. Nor could they hold the Capital monies allotted for the project. Their intent was to make both the architect and contractor respect the Reserve as primary decision makers of the project. Obviously, the request was rejected by Indian Affairs based on some one of their guidelines. Yet Indian Affairs promised the Reserve it would <u>control</u>, and be <u>boss</u>!

Anyhow, the Chief and Council had a battle royal in their hands. Indian Affairs said the Reserve couldn't have the school unless it agreed to a kindergarten to grade 6 school. This is when the famous expression was almost

worked to death, "do you as Indian Affairs work for us or do we work for you, do we as Indian people tell you what to do or do you tell us; do you want to listen to us." This was one battle royal lasting some three months. It was finally resolved when in response to an order paper presented to the government by Minority Member of Parliament, Flora MacDonald, the Minister of Indian Affairs himself consented to the Reserve's request for a kindergarten to grade nine school.

Because the Reserve had won a major battle and not the war, the project experienced terrible non-cooperation from Indian Affairs. In April of 1974, the design plus the detail plans were almost finalized for the school, and by August 1974, the total detailed design and specifications had been submitted. The Chief and Council requested that Indian Affairs examine the final plans, call for tenders, and award the bid. The Chief and Council requested that this be done quickly and that the end of construction be set for August 1, 1975 (about an 11 month construction period) so that school could begin in the middle of August 1975.

Well, another lesson was learned. Although the planning and design stage had been nursed gently it could not compare to the deliberate slowness and the donkey like manner of Indian Affairs. Although the Chief and Council requested in April 1974 that regional department of Indian Affairs participate in all detail planning of the plant, there was little evidence in August 1974 when the plans were approved on the Reserve that anyone in Indian Affairs had fingered through the plans. It took three months for Indian Affairs to examine the specification to call bid, to close bid, and to award the contract and then there were only two bidders! Anyhow, the building was on its way.

5. Providing for Reserve Authority in School Matters

In early winter of 1974, the Chief and Council asked the Team to examine the advantages of having a Reserve School Authority whose responsibility would be to run the new school. The Team created a paper describing the possible terms of reference and the relationships between Chief and Council, Indian Affairs, and the new School Board. In the summer of 1974, the Team convinced both Indian Affairs and the Chief and Council that it was <u>crucial</u> to have a School Authority. This was a very important step. Here were two traditional powers on the Reserve willing to share power with a third new body! The Chief and Council agreed to create a Board who would share with them decisions about the school. The first School Board election was confused with no clear terms of reference, nothing definitely written, yet a popular vote was hold and four persons from the Reserve elected. This first School Board was young and was soon forced to make many decisions for which they had little training or experience. There was limited official contact between the School Board and the Chief and Council. Although the School Board consisted of 5 community members, four elected and one from the Council, a real problem arose when a Department of Indian Affairs official who had no voting power was seen to dominate the decision making since all recognized that he still held control of the money. The Team had succeeded in getting decision making to take place at the local level. The

Team found that if one has never had power, one is scared of it, and that one who traditionally holds the purse strings finds that it is very hard to give up bad, long, old habits, like telling people what to do. Yet the Board exists and continues to make decisions about school matters for the Reserve.

6. Finding University Support for Program Development

In the summer of 1974, the Team made two tries in Canada to find a University to help in program development and staff training. We went to the University of Moncton where we were told that all candidates would have to speak French plus take courses in French, and be at the University of Moncton most of the time. We visited the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, N.B. who wanted the Reserve to agree that they had the solutions to our problem. They said staff shortages would not allow them to provide courses and pilot project site in Tobique. They mentioned lots of money for the service.

In the winter of 1974, a visit to the University of Vermont in Burlington with Roland Goddu to meet with Dr. Edward Ducharme resulted in an arrangement, a first in Canada, whereby training for staff would take place at Tobique, the Director of Mah-Sos School would serve as adjunct faculty, and credits would be given from the University of Vermont. The Reserve held one teacher training course before school opened for two weeks in August 1975.

7. Recruiting a Director (Principal)

In September 1974, the Team projected the need to hire a director to begin employment early in 1975 (January). Thus, he could be involved in staff selection, evaluation of existing programs, transition matters, ordering, training and program development. There was an agreement reached in mid-October by the Chief and Council and Indian Affairs to allot money to hire a director. When the School Board was created it agreed and in December 1974 began an effort to recruit the best director and potential teacher candidates in the U.S.A. and Canada. At the same time Indian Affairs kept flashing a teacher student ratio of 25-1 in front of our noses. We tried to avoid the issue. The Team had advised the School Board and Chief and Council that the school program mattered most and that to make the school functional, we needed x-number of personnel. It took five months to select an acceptable director. It is now clear that the Team had one type of qualification in mind, the Chief another, and the School Board still another. There was a meeting to gain agreement on qualifications. One qualification was agreed upon by all that the director be competent. There was strong desire to get an Indian. Some thought there was agreement that the director would be stable in his own life, or that he be happy in his own life. When the political adjustments led to a decision in early May 1975 three candidates were interviewed. The sole Indian candidate and an American was selected.

In early 1975 an attempt was made to recruit the best possible teacher candidates both from the U.S.A. and Canada. In June 1975, the newly arrived Director decided to change this. Instead of discussing what had previously been agreed to, he chose to hire only Canadian teachers because of the work visa issue. Americans would have to negotiate work visas which he had found unpleasant and unnecessary.

8. The Winds and Rainstorms

As things got hectic, we all forgot the obvious - not talking and reporting to the people we all served what was happening. By June 1975 and even sooner, joint meetings were forgotten. The School Board met alone but not with the Chief and Council or the Team. It may be that the School Board was too scared of professionals, afraid of their lack of knowledge of school matters.

The role of the religious teachers in the school was a tremendous issue. The Nuns had been here for some 40 years, they wanted to be assured or guaranteed positions in the new school. But the School Board had made it known that all positions in the new school were up for competition based on competence. In February 1975, the Church Club became very active in raising the issue of religious instruction and religious teaching personnel. The battle was carried on even in the sermons right in Church and even meetings right in Church.

What a show of strength. One of the aspects of this issue was land ownership. In the winter of 1975, the Chief had gone to see Mother Superior in St. John, N. B. to set up conditions regarding future housing for the Nuns. The Chief further went to the Bishop in Edmundston, N. B. The Chief told the Bishop that the present church and residency of the Parish Priest were on Indian land. The Bishop said that the land was given to them by Indian Affairs. The Chief said that Indian Affairs couldn't give what is not theirs to give. So the battle cry.

In about January 1975, the School Board requested that an evaluation be done by Roland Goddu and Verna Kirkness on the program of studies, the teaching staff of the then existing school. The intention was to find ways to begin development of the program for the new school. The Nuns thought they were being evaluated for dismissal. As things developed there never was a good thorough discussion on the evaluation report along with its recommendations.

In March 1975, at the School Board's request, Darryl Nicholas and Roland Goddu conducted a door to door survey on the present attitudes of parents of the education of their children. The questionnaire was devised to pick up significant attitudes on religion, education, teachers, teacher aides, and native language instruction. Again this report was never discussed.

From the beginning construction phase, the pace was very slow. The construction company had been on site only three months and already a month behind schedule due mainly to its unwillingness to hire enough men. A significant amount of time was spent in trying to force adherence to the work schedule. By September there had been six revised work schedules. Even after the school opened six weeks late in October, in December the school is not finished. We learned that penalty clauses in contracts do not do anything. They are useless. Another way must be found to force the pace of construction so it will be on time.

In April 1975 the Team had completed the furniture requirement for the school and gotten Board approval. This list sat somewhere through July. Someone forgot to call bids for the type of furniture needed to complement the physical plant. In addition the water and sewer pipe installation contract had to be dealt with early in 1975. We had been assured that Indian Affairs would take care of that aspect of the school by August. The final installation was in late September.

The electrical contractor, whose job it was to see to it that 3-phase electric power be made available to the school by August, was not on time. New Brunswick Power Commission is a monopoly. Anyhow, 3-phase power arrived only in September.

During the Fall of 1974 a staff development program had been designed and approved by the School Board in late January. Promised funds never materialized. When the new principal director arrived he redesigned the program utilizing his resource persons and focusing on heritage and philosophy instead of materials development. Instead of having 12 full days of training, we only had nine. The most serious problem here was that the Director, while succeeding in putting in his mark, alienated people and resources who could have helped a lot. A scheduled teacher training exercise during potato break (the traditional three-week work break when families help as farm hands in the nearby potato field) was cancelled. The director went to Montana for 2 1/2 weeks. Looking back it is clear that the Team was disbanded as early as June 1975 when the new director was hired.

9. Getting the School Started

At the end of the school year, June 20, 1975, all education personnel who had been employed both by the Federal Government and Chief and Council were transferred to the School Authority. The budget which had been alone determined by Indian Affairs in November of 1974 was presented to the School Board in May of 1975. A revised budget of some $313,000.00 was prepared and approved. It was taken down to $292,000.00 in a meeting. The School Board was promised that would be the final revision. June 30, 1975 came around, no money to pay education personnel had been transferred. July and August went by; only $50,000 was advanced. On September 5, the Regional Superintendent of Indian Education called the Director and the School Board to Fredericton for a meeting to discuss an education agreement prepared by Indian Affairs to be signed by the Chief and Council before the budget could be turned over. The conditions of the agreement were not acceptable. Power remained vested in Indian Affairs, no decision making control was vested in the Education Authority. In addition, Indian Affairs alone had decided on a budget of $250,000.00 to operate the education program. Upon consultation with the School Board previous to the September 5 meeting a lawyer versed in the Indian Act was engaged to attend the meeting. This upset Indian Affairs very much. Anyhow the Board refused to discuss the education agreement until later. In the meantime, Darryl Nicholas checked out an education agreement which had been signed by Indian Affairs and Indians in Alberta. It turned out that that agreement was not acceptable to Indians. In August at a National Indian Brotherhood Conference in Truro, N. S. it was announced that there was pending a revision of the education section of the Indian Act. The School

Board was advised to wait until the revision was complete. Another battle for control, for decision making, on the size of the budget was looming. A meeting was arranged for October 27 and 28 on the Tobique Reserve with the Chief and Council and School Board with no Indian Affairs. The meeting never took place because the School Board was advised to wait until the revision was complete. Another battle for control, for decision making, on the size of the budget was looming. A meeting was arranged for October 27 and 28 on the Tobique Reserve with the Chief and Council and School Board with no Indian Affairs. The meeting never took place because the School Board and Chief and Council elections were called in the meantime.

The school did open. Teachers are teaching Indian children, a School Board decides affairs. But all is not complete. There remain a few key tasks:

(1) Developing an acceptable Education Agreement that provides for relevant Maliseet education which holds promise for the future;

(2) Renewal of the discussions between the Chief and Council and School Board on the directions for education on the Reserve;

(3) Negotiating a realistic budget and fiscal control with Indian Affairs;

(4) On-going staff development and curriculum development for the school.

We know now a director is not a savior. We need to pursue an improved program for the children of the Reserve that will honor the building that hard and long efforts have built.